DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 687 CS 506 850

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TITLE The Constraints of Metaphor: An Analysis of Three Centuries of American Indian Discourse.
PUB DATE 20 Nov 89
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (75th, San Francisco, CA, November 18-21, 1989). Best available copy.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Historical Materials (060)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *American Indian Culture; *American Indian Literature; *American Indians; Discourse Analysis; *Figurative Language; Public Speaking; Rhetorical Criticism; Rhetorical Invention; United States History
IDENTIFIERS Ethnic Literature

ABSTRACT

The use of figurative language permeates American Indian discourse, across differences in time, geography, and tribal culture. Traditionally, the presence of figurative language has been attributed to a compulsion for decoration and to a need for mnemonic devices. However, neither of these explanations accounts for changes in the rich tapestry of figurative language as the threat to Indian culture increased. An examination of 259 Indian speeches delivered between 1609 and 1912 suggests that there are three primary functions of figurative language. The first function is to mirror conditions of the microcosm in the macrocosm, using discourse as a means to secure order, harmony, and balance. A steady shift from images of harmony and balance to those of confusion and incongruity characterize Indian rhetoric from 1609 to 1912. Second, figurative language in Indian oratory intensifies Indian experience of the world through two recurrent types of depiction: (1) establishing quantitative information such as numbers of men and size of objects not easily expressed in finite counting systems; and (2) conveying conditions of existence such as thoughts and feelings. Thirdly, Indian figurative language measures time without artificial marks of time, but rather provides the essence of chronology by blending past, present, and future in the qualitative terms of figurative language. Figurative language functions not just as a cuing device or ornamentation, but as a powerful mode of thought. Figurative expression becomes a form of self-revelation for the Indian orator and a documentary on Indian-White relationships for the historian, preserving the Indian's bitter awareness of his situation in a changing world. (Sixty notes are included.) (SR)

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THE CONSTRAINTS OF METAPHOR:

AN ANALYSIS OF THREE CENTURIES OF AMERICAN INDIAN DISCOURSE

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, San Francisco, November 20, 1989.

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In spite of differences in culture, geography, and historical time, the use of figurative language permeates American Indian discourse. This common characteristic lead DeWitt Clinton to remark in the early nineteenth century that the Indians studied with "much care and application" the forms of oratory including figurative expression to the extent that "it was an attainment to which they devoted themselves, and to which they bent the whole force of their faculties." [1] Benjamin Franklin also noted the fine literary merit of certain Indian treaties, especially their poetic expression, and Thomas Jefferson claimed Indian orators rivalled Cicero and Demosthenes. [2] More recently, scholars argue, "The red man's rhetoric was, however, distinguished principally by its metaphorical expression. One of the Indian's strongest delights in speaking was in poetic invention." [3] These conclusions seem warranted since most extant Indian oratory reveals the persistence of figurative language. [4]

Concluding his study of the American Indian, W.C. Vanderwerth called for a more complete understanding of their reaction to a civilization completely alien to their own. [5] The language of Indian oratory preserves for us the thoughts of American Indians as they faced challenges to their way of life. Three problems are of special interest. First, why is the figurative language so consistent in spite of the variables of time, geography, and tribal culture? And, what are the most frequently repeated images and how do they function? In order to answer these questions, this study will consider speech texts representing 259 speeches by 204 Indian speakers from 1609 to 1912. These texts have been historically documented and can be found in several public collections of Indian oratory. [6]

While the pervasiveness of Indian figurative expression is curious, it is more so because it has survived through highly fragmented records, often in the diaries or jottings of white settlers and frontiersmen. [7] Despite the lack of uniform transcribers and translators, these speeches show consistent use of figurative language. Certain images persist in remarkably similar usage among almost all Indian tribes across several centuries.

In an attempt to understand why such internal consistency occurs in figurative language, this analysis will begin by examining two current explanations for the extensive use of figurative language in Indian oratory and then propose an alternative explanation. A careful examination of Indian rhetoric will suggest that the function of figurative speech in Indian oratory goes beyond currently accepted explanations. Figurative language functions to express the American Indian's understanding of quantitative relationships through his reverence for nature. This not only explains why certain image groups appear repeatedly, but also why the use of figurative language

dominates Indian oratory.

I

Previously, two explanations have been advanced for the extensive figurative language in Indian rhetoric. Some suggest that Indians were simply fond of ornamentation. The wealth of their language, like their enthusiasm for beads and trinkets, is compensation for the dullness of everyday existence. [8] This explanation is quickly dismissed as one realizes that Indian metaphors and similes are drawn exclusively from their daily existence, in particular, from their encounters with the richness of nature. The reverence of the Indian for the vastness of his surroundings readily apparent through his use of figurative language. [9] Rather than an escape, figurative language calls attention to the conditions of the Indian's existence.

Another explanation is that figurative language served as a mnemonic device in an oral tradition. The physical counterpart of this Ciceronian concept is the wampum belt which preserved agreements in the predominately non-literate cultures of the Indian tribes. [10] Just as beads on the wampum belt signified agreements, images functioned as markers in oratory, making arguments easier for both listener and speaker to recall. While this explanation accounts for the presence of figurative language, it does not explain the variety of figurative language employed in Indian rhetoric. That is, if figures were used to cue speakers, a pattern of usage should emerge. It does not. Instead, the figures are varied and their variation derives from their meaning.

These traditional explanations provided by historians for the persistence of figurative language in Indian oratory fail to address the function of those images in creating meaning in the discourse. This gap suggests the need for another explanation for the consistency of figurative language in Indian oratory. In developing such an explanation, one must recognize that Indian culture was exclusively oral. With few exceptions, Indians relied upon the spoken word to preserve values, historical facts, and attitudes from one generation to the next. The importance of expression, especially in the ritualized form of oratory, cannot be underestimated. [11] Indian speakers had at their disposal a memorized set of metaphors which they employed in emphasizing certain ideas in their speeches. [12] This partially accounts for the similarity of metaphors from tribe to tribe. The standard set of images is drawn almost exclusively from what Indian knew most intimately, natural phenomenon. Such stylized utterances were carefully cultivated, highly admired, and often copied and woven into the fabric of future oratory. For example, an historian of Indian culture noted, "The three metaphors of fire, road, and chain were often used by Indians to symbolize the good relationship which they hoped would exist between them and the

whites." [13] Kanickhungo of the Six Nations, for example, used all three metaphors in a speech preserved from 1736 negotiations with white men. Some 20 years later, a Delaware chief, Shingis, offered to "hold fast the chain of friendship--that ancient chain which our forefathers held with their brothers the English." [14] In the same century, the chiefs of the Shawnee, Potawatomi, Seneca, Creek, Chippewa, and Cayuga repeated the metaphors of fire, road, and chain in formal speeches. The attention given to figurative language is augmented by the Indian's reverence for natural phenomenon. [15] Figurative language in Indian discourse draws almost exclusively from nature. Since all American Indian tribes were closely associated with nature, this provides a common denominator as the source of figurative language.

The dramatic change in figurative language as the Indians faced the advance of white civilization provides additional insight into its function. While figurative language continues to dominate the speeches of Indian leaders, it no longer expresses the positive rapport the Indians sought to establish with the white man. Instead, the fires have been extinguished, the chains are broken and, as Standing Bear notes in 1879, the Indians see "a steep, stony path rise up before them." [16] As their way of life became increasingly threatened, Indian oratory began to exhibit changes expressing awareness of the conflict with white civilization. The ideas conveyed by the figurative language change to reflect changing historical events suggesting that such language served to record ideas, thus functioning as much more than a mnemonic or decorative device. Hermann G. Stelzner concludes that "The predominant interests and ideas of any period are reflected in its figurative language which in turn affects and influences the subjects to which it is applied." [17] Viewing figurative language in Indian oratory as a record of changing attitudes offers a means of understanding how native American Indian leaders addressed the problem of the white man. As Stelzner suggests, the predominant interests and ideas of this period of conflict in American history can be discovered in our records of its rhetoric. Indian oratory is, perhaps, as near as we can come to the thoughts of this continent's original inhabitants. [18]

II

An analysis of 259 Indian speeches delivered between 1609 and 1912 reveals three primary uses of figurative language; each functions to record ideas and to preserve Indian attitudes toward white civilization. Changes in all three categories of usage witness the collision of the Indian and white civilizations. Figurative language in Indian oratory (1) mirrors conditions of the microcosm in the macrocosm, (2) intensifies the qualities of Indian experience, and (3) reflects historical time. Most Indian rhetoric, due to the common denominators which unify the utterances of disparate Indian cultures, is characterized by all

three uses of figurative language. The changes in images provide a clue to the Indian's attitudes toward the onslaught of white civilization. An examination of each of the three uses of figurative language will provide a glimpse of the clash as the Indian orator expressed it.

Mirrors of the Macrocosm. In the Indian view, harmony and balance in the surrounding environment were highly prized and sometimes subject to intervention through ritualized human utterances. The Navajo, for example, used discourse to secure order in the universe in a direct manner. [19] The balance in the microcosm for the Navajo spokesman was a result of events of the macrocosm. Language was instrumental in restoring incongruent elements of both worlds, thus, preserving or restoring harmony. While differences existed among the tribes of the North American continent in their mythologies, languages, and customs, a common belief linking Indian cultures was their use of discourse as a means to secure order, harmony and balance. As for the Navajo, expression reflects conditions of stability and, in itself, provides a stabilizing force in all Indian rhetoric. [20] Language became an extension of order created intentionally by humans. As a result, figurative expression in the discourse of the Indian was more than simple ornamentation or memory-cuing, it was a reflection of the macrocosm in harmony. [21] As such, it was rhetorical in its function and central in Indian discourse.

As the white man was originally introduced to the Indian in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Indian oratory shows a positive balance in world order. The reception of Marquette and Joliet in the camp of the Peorias in 1673 is typical. Chief Nikinapi's words capture the optimism that the Indian nation felt at the coming of the white men:

> Never has the earth been so lovely nor the sun so bright, as today; never has our river been so calm, or so free from rocks, for your canoes have removed them as they passed; never has our tobacco had so fine a flavor, nor our corn appeared so beautiful as we behold it today. [22]

Peace in the universe presages peace between men. Nine years later after Nikinapi's words were recorded, a Delaware chief prophesied the shining of the sun and moon in the skies forever as he signed a peace treaty with William Penn just as his descendant, Teedyuscung, referred to the birds' song in the 1758 speech to the lieutenant governor of Pennsylvania. [23] Chiefs of the Wyandotte, Fond du Lac, and Potawatomi as well as other Indian nations of the Atlantic coast were equally enthusiastic in welcoming the white man in the initial days of their contact. Their words ensure the well-being of the Indian world through harmonious images such as clear skies, smooth pathways, and other references to nature.

As contacts between whites and Indians become troubled, Indian discourse lost its optimism. While references are made to the natural peacefulness of the world, additional figures expressing disharmony punctuate the discourse. For example, the Seneca warrior Red Jacket expresses pleasure at a meeting with whites in 1792, but the tone of his remarks undergoes transformation as he describes the encroachment of the white man upon Indian lands. He reminds his white listeners, "Our seats were once large, and yours were very small. You have now become a great people and we have scarcely a place left to spread our blankets." [24] Petalescharo of the Pawnee Loups echoes these sentiments at an 1822 conference with President Monroe. Though figurative expression is abundant in this speech, the theme can be summarized in this reference to the Great Spirit: "He made the whites to cultivate the earth, and feed on domestic animals; but he made us red skins, to rove through the uncultivated woods and plains; to feed on wild animals; and to dress up with their skins." [25] The abundance of game, the ease of pursuit, and the balance of nature of are all expressions of the Indian's contentment with his universe. When the universe is in order, the Indian's existence is pleasant, but when the essential harmony of life is disturbed, game becomes scarce, the chase is arduous, and hunger haunts the hearth. As his relationship with the white man deteriorates, the Indian uses fewer figures of speech reflecting harmony and chooses discordant images with increasing frequency. Tecumseh, for example, was persistent in thwarting the greedy white settlers on behalf of his Shawnee nation. In one such attempt to construct an Indian confederation, Tecumseh poses the question, where are the Pequot, the Narrangansett, the Mohican, and the Pocanet? He answers, they are vanished "before the avarice and oppression of the white man, as snow before the summer sun." [26] This juxtaposition of the seasons expresses a disruption of the laws of the universe. Disharmony and evil prevail under such conditions. In many instances, nature is altered in the presence of corruption. A Chitmacha chief's concern over the death of a white missionary at the hands of his tribesmen shows the extent of depravity:

> The sun was red before, the path was full of thorns and brambles, the clouds were black, the water troubled and stained with our blood, . . . the game fled from us, the snakes hissed and bared their fangs; the birds, . . . seemed to sing only the songs of death. [27]

Similar concern that nature be harmonious is repeated in Indian discourse as late as the Civil War period. Some of this expression is hopeful as in John Ross' desire that the clouds which overspread the land vanish and the Indian prosper, or Chochise and Santank's visions of the sun of peace shining in the sky forever when all men talk and act with honesty. [28] However, images of harmony are few denoting that the innocent optimism of the initial encounters with white civilization is gone.

A steady shift from images of harmony and balance to those of confusion and incongruity characterize Indian rhetoric from 1609 to 1912. It is apparent from their language that Indians perceived the threat of white civilization to their way of life and expressed it in their discourse in an attempt to order the universe.

A rationale for this linguistic phenomenon is provided in the cultural homologization of ideas and actions when, as Richard Weaver explains,

> . . . the collective consciousness of the group creates a mode of looking at the world or arrives at some imaginative visual bearing. It 'sees' the world metaphorically according to some felt need of the group, and this entails an ordering which denotes dissatisfaction with "things as they are." [29]

These rankings and orderings which both define and prescribe the world permeate every facet of Indian rhetoric. The typical expression of Indian spokesmen involved the world they know intimately, the world of nature. [30] This closeness of the Indian to nature forms a common bond among tribes despite other differences. The result is a homologous rhetoric of "acquired habits, widely shared by speakers within a particular society, influencing both the speaker and his own cultural audience." [31] Further evidence for such a rhetoric is supplied as individual Indian spokesmen express the threat of white expansion in similar fashion, envisioning a disruption of nature's harmony. As civilization encroached on the Indian's way of life, his figurative expression reflected these changes.

Intensification of Indian Experience. The second function of figurative language, pervasive throughout Indian oratory, is intensification of the Indian experience of the world. Facts, people, and events are all depicted through images. Two recurrent types of description occur: (1) figurative language establishes quantitative information such as numbers of men and sizes of objects, and (2) it also serves to convey conditions of existence such as thoughts and feelings. Each use reveals the Indian reaction to white expansion.

Figurative language serves to describe phenomenon not easily expressed in finite counting systems. White Cloud, for example, reminisces that once herds of buffalo turned the prairies black with their numbers. [32] And in his touching farewell speech, the captive Black Hawk tells of the preceding battle in which "bullets flew like birds in the air." [33] These examples and additional evidence suggest that Indian orators relied upon figurative language to quantify huge numbers, including their experience of white population growth.

The most common images quantify white population as its expands in Indian territory. Prior to 1830, there are no recorded references to the size of the white population. The earliest reference occurs in 1830 as the venerable Potawatomi Senachwine considers the white men of the East "whose numbers are like the sands of the sea." [34] In the same period, Keokuk recognizes the superiority of the white race in this passage: "Their cabins are as plenty as the trees in the forest, and their soldiers are springing up like grass on the prairies." [35] A decade later, Seathl of the Dwamish echoes the grass analogy and Keokuk's prophecy in a haunting prediction that the Indian must ultimately fail against such odds. [36] Perhaps the best understanding of the Indian's situation is given by Little Crow prior to the 1862 Minnesota uprising. He relates to his young braves, "The white men are like the locusts when they fly so thick that the whole sky is a snowstorm; You may kill one--two--ten; yes, as many as the leaves in the forest yonder, and their brothers will not miss them." He imagines a two month trek to the battlefields of the Civil War and along that path "white soldiers as thick as tamaracks in the swamps of the Ojibways." [37] Images as vivid as these become more frequent in the discourse of Indians as they witness the endless streams of white settlers moving across their lands.

Many of the Indian's confrontations with the white man are also described figuratively as feelings, thoughts, and the conditions of existence. Such images function to intensify the message of the spokesman. Many chiefs, for example, related military encounters figuratively. The braves of Commanche Ten Bears seek revenge like buffalo bulls whose cows are attacked and Seathl likens the soldiers of Washington to a "bristling wall." [38] In other comparisons of contempt, Tecumseh calls the British groundhogs and Black Hawk says, "Those chiefs would do to paddle a canoe but not to steer it." [39]

Often, the Indian's opinion of the white man's actions and intentions is couched in snake imagery. Black Hawk and others utilize this comparison and its venomous effects in conveying the impact of white culture on Indian ways. Not all Indians relied on the traditional snake images, however. The Four Bears, dying of smallpox in the epidemic which decimated his tribe in 1837, called the white men a set of "black harted dogs." [40] It is clear how he thought the white visitors had repaid Mandan generosity.

The Indian reaction to reservation life is intensely negative and well preserved through figurative expression. Washakie of the Shoshones surveyed the sorry remnants of his tribe cornered "like guilty prisoners" watched by armed white guards. [41] His memories are hardly less hostile than those of other Indians forced to live in confinement. White

Eagle of the Ponca tribe, whose friendship toward whites was unequalled, complained that they were herded like ponies, brutally, without regard to life. [42] Wovoka, messenger of the Ghost Dance medicine, is condemned to the barren reservation "where a horned toad would die" and Simon Pokagon's memories are of an earlier life when the Indian had not fallen "before the cyclone of civilization as before a prairie fire." [43] In these and other instances concerning Indian-white confrontation, figurative language intensifies the hatred and bitterness of the Indian legacy. Only one exception to the universal reaction is recorded as Crowfoot, a Blackfoot warrior, remembers the Canadian Mounted Police. He compares their protection to that of the feathers of a bird which "protects it from the frosts of winter." [44] While this exception exists in the recorded speeches of the Indian orators, the overwhelming majority of figurative language expresses the bitter feelings of the Indians toward the white man.

Figurative language expressing quantitative and experiential information in Indian rhetoric shows a progressive evolution. The first confident encounters with the white man give way to grievances increasingly voiced in the rhetoric of all North American tribes after the 1830's. The optimism as Indians greeted the first white men stands in stark contrast to the expression of the reservation Indian. The changing character of Indian rhetoric mirrors white expansion coupled with the decline of the Indian nations.

Measurement of time. The third use of figurative language in Indian discourse is as a measure of time. The Indian orator often predicts future events and recalls past occurrences through comparisons based on language images. Unlike the white culture which lived in the grip of mechanical time, the Indian was unaccustomed to linear measures of time. The tasks of life maintenance such as the buffalo hunt and winter encampment occurred when the season and conditions favored them rather than on an arbitrary day or month. The Indian lived in harmony with his environment and his attitude toward time was shaped by that relationship. [45] As a result, Indian rhetoric includes few artificial marks of time, but rather provides the essence of chronology through figurative language which compresses linear events. Typically used by archaic societies reliant upon myth and ritual, such cyclical time blends past, present, and future in the qualitative terms of figurative language. [46] Two categories of time dominate Indian rhetoric: (1) references to past heritage and (2) predictions of future events. In each category figurative language locates the Indian in the flow of historical time simultaneously recording Indian-white relationships--the combination of the bright past and an uncertain future.

The growth metaphor is recurrent as Indian orators describe

the history of their past relationship to the white man. An early view is presented by Black Hawk in 1832. Although he recognizes the present weakness of the Indian nation, Black Hawk paints the portrait of the white man's arrival. He describes the pitiful, anemic creature befriended, fed, and clothed by the Indian. Then, he relates,

> Had our fathers the desire, they could have crushed the intruders out of existence with the same ease we kill the blood-sucking mosquitoes. Little did our fathers then think they were taking to their bosoms, and warming them to life, a lot of torpid, half-frozen and starving vipers, which in a few winters would fix their deadly fangs upon the very bosom that had nursed and cared for them when they needed help. [47]

The steady assimilation of Indian land by the white man as he began to gain strength is the Indian inheritance. The purpose of this collapse of time metaphorically is to place the events of chronological history into perspective. History is recounted, not in days, years or events, but as a struggle which parallels the Indian ebb and flow of time.

The rhetoric of the Indian presumes that man is born into history. If he is to be persuaded, the arguments addressed to him "must have historicity as well as logicality." [48] In this way, the figures of speech capturing history serve as vivid arguments concerning the Indian's relationship with the white man. A review of additional Indian rhetoric substantiates this conclusion.

The aged Creek chieftain, Speckled Snake, remembers the coming of the white man. He tells the story:

> When the first white man came over the wide waters, he was but a little man. . . very little. His legs were cramped by sitting long in his boat, and he begged for a little land. . . When he came to these shores the Indians gave him land, and kindled fires to make him comfortable. . . But when the white man had warmed himself at the Indian's fire, and had filled himself with the Indian's hominy, the became very large. He stopped not at the mountain tops, and his foot covered the plains. . . [49]

The narrative continues as the white man, ever growing larger and stronger, pushes the Indians west. Similar references using the growth metaphor can be found as early as 1790 by the Seneca Cornplanter and continue throughout the 1800's. Crazy Bear, an Assiniboin, and Charlot, a Flathead, are typical of this period. Their personification of history condenses the Indian-white relationship in a manner acceptable in a culture

unfettered by linear time constraints.

Considering the Indian's relationship to chronological time, it is natural that the Indian orator choose figurative language to concretize future events. The world of nature and past experience provides the raw material for references to future events in lieu of artificial time projections. The key to the Indian view of the future is the central value he places on harmonious blending of past, present, and future. Instead of dividing time into units, he relates it as experience which can with equal ease occur in the past, present, or future. [50] Evidence of this is clear in the record of Indian oratory. For example, Thomas Jefferson received this reply to a treaty in 1806: "The stinking cloud may rise; it will melt away when we remember the word of our fathers. The bad birds may fly over our heads with crow mischief, they will hush and fly away when hearing the word of our fathers. . ." [51] This figurative response relied upon hypothetical events of nature which might occur in the future. The specific future point, however, is not defined although the hypothetical events could occur at any time. In this manner the Indian speakers conceptualized the remainder of historical time as disharmonious daily events kept in check by human language.

The Indian's placement of himself in the intersection of past, present, and future can be glimpsed in many Indian orations. Among them, both Black Hawk of the Sauk nation and Menewa of the Creek intertwine their own destinies as part of the scheme of nature. Both locate themselves in the cycle of nature and, in this manner, predict their deaths. [52] Death is also forecast as an integral element of nature by Little Crow before the Minnesota uprising in 1862. He tells impatient braves that, "You will die like the rabbits when the hungry wolves hunt them in the Hard Moon of January." [53] Tecumseh, too, refers to the ultimate destiny of his Indian nation "as leaves are driven before the wintry storms." [54] In each case, the figurative expression reveals the time through nature.

The relationship of the Indian and white nations is crystallized through Indian references to future events. As the nineteenth century unfolded, the rhetoric of Indian spokesmen contained more numerous references to the ultimate fate of Indian tribes. Others like Seathl understood that as wave follows wave at sea, one nation must be supplanted by the next. [55] The Indian's place in the cycle of civilizations was as evident to dozens of additional spokesmen. Each, without exception, phrases the future time in terms of natural phenomena. In a unique combination of past time and future expectations, Petalesharo of the Pawnee tribe speaks of the camp where he would awake to find buffalo feeding peacefully. Sensing the impact of the buffalo slaughter, he asks that the peace pipe, leggings and other items of Indian culture be deposited in the white man's museums for his

children to view when there is no longer an Indian way of life.[56] Past, present, and future are summarized in the buffalo, a forceful image for an Indian audience.

References to time labelled as days, months, and years are rare in Indian rhetoric. Instead, the Indian orator relied upon figurative references to recall the past and predict the future as continuous occurrences rather than as discrete units. Figurative expression which relies upon the natural world assumes the harmony of the Indian's place in the cycle of events, both past and future.

III

As historians trace the relationship of North American Indian tribes in their dealings with white civilization, they reach surprisingly uniform conclusions. It is generally agreed that as white settlement pushed west, each tribe, in turn, met this offensive with a similar, tragic fate. These confrontations span decades--from the decimation of Indian populations on the Atlantic coast to the submission of plains tribes at Wounded Knee.

This Indian history can also be traced through their rhetoric witnessing the confrontation with white values and ultimate recognition of their historical plight in the face of a disappearing way of life. From the first encounters with the men of Europe until the last clash of arms Indian rhetoric is characterized by abundant figurative language. This language records the Indians reactions to the advance of white civilization as clearly as their winter count skins or histories written by observers.

In their classic study of the American Indian's vanished culture, Alice Marriott and Carol Rachlin concluded, "It is in their oratory and their oral literature that the Indians have left their lasting monument, and it shall endure."[57] Through this monument, the Indian orators reveal their attitudes, feelings, and reactions to the steady encroachment of an alien civilization. It is the predominant figurative language of their oratory that has been most often noted by observers. Traditionally, the presence of figurative language has been attributed to a compulsion for decoration and to a need for mnemonic devices. However, neither of these explanations accounts for changes in the rich tapestry of figurative language as the threat to Indian culture increased.

This analysis suggests that there are three primary functions of figurative language which recur in Indian oratory. These are consistent uses across a wide variety of Indian cultures and tribes because of the Indian oral tradition and because of the Indian environment. Figurative language: (1) mirrors the conditions of the microcosm in the macrocosm, (2)

intensifies the Indian experience of the world, and (3) reflects historical time, especially the past and future. Figurative expression functions best to capture this panorama of ideas because it can capture the realm which is neither fantasy or abstraction. As Ernst Cassirer concludes, it is the realm wherein "pure feeling can find utterance, and can therewith attain its full and concrete actualization." [58] In an oral culture which does not permit extensive quantitative distinctions, metaphorical thinking predominates. [59] Figurative language functions not just as a cuing device or ornamentation, but as a powerful mode of thought.

In each of these functions, the critic finds a record of Indian thought and reaction; the discourses become, as Philip Wander defines them, "cultural products in the context of ideological struggles." [60] Indians initially welcome the white man, but as white expansion escalates in spite of Indian opposition, there is a shift in the figurative language signaling the conflict of cultures. Consistent, internal evidence of such changes are preserved in the speeches of over two hundred Indian orators. Figurative expression becomes a form of self-revelation for the Indian orator and a documentary on Indian-white relationships for the historian. For the historian reviewing the past, the fragments of Indian rhetoric preserve the Indian's bitter awareness of his situation in a changing world.

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